

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 4261

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT SUMMARY)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, MOPS, LA

SUBJECT: QUARTERLY REPORT FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY INGERSOLL

BEGIN SUMMARY: FORMATION OF THE COALITION CABINET AND POLITICAL COUNCIL ON APRIL 5 HAS CREATED A NEW POLITICAL SITUATION IN LAOS. SO FAR THE PATHET LAO MEMBERS OF THESE BODIES HAVE GENERALLY AVOIDED ABRASIVE OR DIDACTIC POSTURING, BUT HAVE TAKEN HARD POSITIONS ON ISSUES THEY CONSIDER IMPORTANT. THEY HAVE SEIZED THE INITIATIVE IN THE TWO BODIES BY PRESENTING PROPOSALS COVERING BOTH THE PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE CABINET AND A SUBSTANTIVE POLITICAL PROGRAM FOR THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT. THE VIENTIANE SIDE, RENDERED LEADERLESS BY SOUVANNA'S ACCESSION TO THE "NEUTRAL PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION" PRESCRIBED IN THE ACCORDS, HAS NOT MATCHED THE PATHET LAO DRIVE AND ORGANIZATION. OUR RELATIONS WITH PATHET LAO MINISTERS HAVE BEEN CORRECT, ALTHOUGH RADIO PATHET LAO MAINTAINS ITS STRIDENT ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA PARTIALLY ECHOED IN THE NEW "POLITICAL PROGRAM" PRODUCED BY PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG'S JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL. EVENTS OF RECENT WEEKS HAVE ALSO CLEARLY REVEALED THAT DIRECTIVES FOR PATHET LAO ARE ISSUED FROM SAM NEUA. THERE IS NO INDICATION SO FAR THAT THE CAPTURED US CONTRACT AIR PILOT EMMET KAY WILL BE RELEASED BY THE JUNE 4 DEADLINE OR THAT NVA TROOPS WILL BE WITHDRAWN FROM LAOS IN THEIR ENTIRETY, BUT WE DOUBT THAT

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WE COULD PROMOTE MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNIST COMPLIANCE WITH THE

LAOS ACCORDS BY ADOPTING A HARDENED USG STANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FORMATION OF THE NEW LAO COALITION GOVERNMENT (PGNU) AND JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL (JNPC) ON APRIL 5 WAS FOLLOWED BY A MONTH OF CEREMONIES, THE USUAL GOVERNMENTAL HIATUS DURING LAO NEW YEAR, AND A WEEK OR SO OF GEARING UP THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS NEW MEMBERSHIP TO FACE THE WORK AT HAND. FOR THAT REASON, WE DEFERRED THIS QUARTERLY REPORT UNTIL WE COULD GET A BETTER READING ON THE STYLE AND ACTIONS OF THE PATHET LAO LEADERS IN VIENTIANE AND LUANG PRABANG, AND DECIDED TO FORWARD IT BY CABLE RATHER THAN BY LETTER AS PREVIOUSLY.

2. IN THE PRESENT REPORT, WE WILL DISCUSS THE POLITICAL SITUATION THAT HAS DEVELOPED FOLLOWING THE FORMATION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT; PATHET LAO ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. AND U.S. OBJECTIVES AND POSTURE.

A. PATHET LAO STYLE AND ACTIONS

3. AN ENTIRELY NEW POLITICAL SITUATION WAS CREATED IN LAOS ON APRIL 5, WHEN--AFTER MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS--TWO COALITION BODIES WERE ESTABLISHED: THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION (PGNU) AND THE JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL (JNPC). THE JOINT CENTRAL COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT (JCCIA) HAD BEEN FORMED EARLIER, ON OCTOBER 23, 1973.

4. EACH BODY IS EQUALLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE TWO OPPOSING PARTIES: THE VIENTIANE SIDE (AS WE NOW CALL THE GROUPING OF POLITICAL LEADERS WHO ONCE FORMED THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT) AND THE PATHET LAO. ALL DECISIONS MUST BE REACHED BY UNANIMITY, WITH SOUVANNA PHOUMA PRESIDING AS A "NEUTRAL" ARBITRATOR OVER THE WHOLE. THE TERMS OF REFERENCE ARE SUFFICIENTLY VAGUE THAT THE REAL AND RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF EACH BODY WILL FINALLY DEPEND ON THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF THE PERSONALITIES INVOLVED.

5. FORMATION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT REPRESENTS THE LATEST EFFORT TO RECONCILE THE POLITICAL DIFFERENCES THAT HAVE DIVIDED THIS COUNTRY IN THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. THESE DIFFERENCES HAVE, IN EFFECT, REFLECTED THE DIVISIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ONTO THE INTERNAL LAO SCENE. TWO PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT
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FORMING A COALITION GOVERNMENT IN LAOS (1958 AND 1962) FOUNDERED, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE OF CONTINUING TENSIONS IN INDO-CHINA. SUCCESS SEEMS MORE LIKELY THIS TIME BECAUSE THE PRC, USSR AND U.S. SEEM TO HAVE REACHED A CONSENSUS THAT THE PRESENT TREND OF EVENTS DOES NOT RUN COUNTER TO THEIR INTERESTS IN THIS AREA.

6. THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS NOW REGARDING THE PROSPECTS OF THE COALITION CONCERN THE DIRECTION OF PATHET LAO POLICY AND THEIR

STYLE OF OPERATIONS. WHAT ARE THE MOOD AND INTENT OF THE PATHET LAO LEADERSHIP AFTER TEN YEARS OF WAR AND ISOLATION? WILL THEY PUSH HARD TO TAKE OVER QUICKLY, OR WILL THEY SEEK TO COOPERATE WITH THE VIENTIANE SIDE? AFTER NEARLY TWO MONTHS OF THE NEW COALITION, PARTIAL ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS ARE BEGINNING TO EMERGE.

7. THE BASIC FACT OF THE NEW SITUATION IS THAT, WHILE THE PATHET LAO CONTINUE TO GOVERN THEIR ZONE WITHOUT INTERFERENCE, THEY CAN NOW LEGITIMATELY CLAIM CO-RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALSO GOVERNING THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. IT IS A POSITION OF CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH, AND NOT ONE THAT THEY WILL EASILY SEE WHITTLED AWAY. THIS IS HOW THE SITUATION IS PERCEIVED BY THE VIENTIANE SIDE, WHICH GENERALLY VIEWED THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT AS A MARKED VICTORY FOR THE PATHET LAO. SO FAR, HOWEVER, THE PATHET LAO HAVE PROCEEDED WITH CARE AND FLEXIBILITY EXCEPT ON ISSUES THEY CONSIDERED OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE, BUT THEY HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN BOTH BODIES.

8. THE PATHET LAO MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES OF STATE HAVE BEGUN BY LEARNING THE OPERATIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF THEIR MINISTRIES, TRYING TO DEVELOP GOOD RELATIONS WITH THEIR OPPOSITE NUMBERS AND THE CIVIL SERVANTS AND AVOIDING ABRASIVE OR DIDACTIC POSTURING. THEY HAVE NOT TRIED TO CHANGE THE COMPOSITION OF THE MINISTRIES, BRINGING WITH THEM ONLY A FEW SPECIAL ASSISTANTS, WHO APPEAR TO BE INTELLIGENT, TOUGH AND EDUCATED YOUNG MEN. IN DEALINGS WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, THE PATHET LAO MINISTERS--PARTICULARLY PHOUMI VONGVICHIT (THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN MINISTER/ SENIOR PATHET LAO IN TOWN)--HAVE BEEN AFFABLE, AVAILABLE AND NON-DIDACTIC.

9. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PATHET LAO HAVE CLEARLY SEIZED THE INITIATIVE: AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE GOVERNMENT, PHOUMI
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VONGVICHIT LAID OUT A TEN-POINT "WORK PROGRAM." THIS HAS BEEN THE ONLY DOCUMENT PRESCRIBING PROCEDURES FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S WORK, AND IT WAS QUICKLY APPROVED.

10. THE JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL IN LUANG PRABANG WAS ALSO QUICKLY DOMINATED BY THE PATHET LAO. THEIR PURPOSE IN NAMING PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG AS CHAIRMAN OF THIS BODY, RATHER THAN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, HAS NOW BECOME CLEARER. SOUPHANOUVONG CAN CLAIM BEING THE EQUAL OF SOUVANNA PHOUMA, AS THEY HEAD EQUAL BODIES OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. THIS GIVES SOUPHANOUVONG A PLATFORM AND A FREEDOM OF ACTION WHICH HE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD IN THE CABINET.

11. IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT WHAT SOUPHANOUVONG PROPOSES, THE COUNCIL WILL ENDORSE. THUS, IN AN 18-PAGE SPEECH MAY 10, HE WAS

ABLE TO LAY OUT A COMPLETE "POLITICAL PROGRAM" WHICH WAS LATER CONDENSED AND SUPPORTED BY THE COUNCIL. SINCE THE VIENTIANE SIDE HAS NOT (AND IS NOT LIKELY TO) PRODUCE A COMPARABLE PAPER, THIS PROGRAM WILL SERVE AS THE GUIDELINES FOR THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE. PHOUMI'S TEN-POINT PROPOSAL IN THE PGNU CONCERNED WORK PROCEDURES--PERHAPS BECAUSE IN THIS BODY THE VIENTIANE SIDE IS RELATIVELY STRONGER; SOUPHANOUVONG'S PROGRAM.

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IS SUBSTANTIVE.

12. WE HAVE REPORTED IN DETAIL ON THIS SPEECH, BUT, IN SUMMARY, IT CONFORMS WITH THE STYLE ADOPTED BY THE PATHET LAO: IT IS NOT EXTREMIST; IT TAKES NO WHOLLY UNACCEPTABLE POSITON; IT IS CRITICAL OF THE U.S. AND THAILAND; AND IT IS HIGHLY NATIONALISTIC, BUT ACCEPTS AID FROM ANY QUARTER AND CALLS FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES. SOUPHANOUVONG'S SPEECH WAS BOILED DOWN INTO SIX PAGES AND APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL ON MAY 24. WE WOULD, THEREFORE, EXPECT THIS PROGRAM TO BE ACCEPTED BY THE PGNU AS ITS CHARTER.

13. FINALLY, MOST JCCIA DECISIONS HAVE BEEN BASED ON PATHET LAO PROPOSALS. WHEN THE VIENTIANE SIDE RAISES AN ISSUE THE PATHET LAO DO NOT WANT TO TREAT, THEY SIMPLY SAY THAT OTHER MATTERS ARE MORE URGENT AND MUST BE ADDRESSED FIRST.

14. THE CLIMATE OF RECONCILIATION WAS DAMPENED WHEN THE PATHET LAO SCUTTLED THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AN EVENT THAT ILLUSTRATES THE TWIN REALITY BENEATH THE FACADE: THAT THE PATHET LAO WILL GO TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTHS ON ISSUES THEY CONSIDER IMPORTANT, AND THAT THE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OF THE MOVEMENT REMAINS IN SAM NEUA.

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15. A QUESTION ARISES IN REGARD TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A FUTURE DIVISION OF VIEWPOINT BETWEEN THE PATHET LAO LEADERS WITH WHOM WE ARE IN TOUCH AND THE OTHERS WHO REMAINED IN SAM NEUA. WILL THE PATHET LAO LEADERSHIP IN LUANG PRABANG AND VIENTIANE BECOME SATISFIED THAT THEY ARE NO LONGER THREATENED BY THE U.S., THAIS AND VIENTIANE SIDE AND THAT THEY CAN WORK MORE CONFIDENTLY WITH THEM, WHILE THE LEADERSHIP IN SAM NEUA REMAINS COILED AROUND ITS PREJICES AND FEARS, NURTURED BY ITS ISOLATION? OR IS THIS A WHOLLY ARTIFICIAL AND IRRELEVANT QUESTION, THE PATHET LAO CARRYING OUT AN IDEOLOGICAL PROGRAM FROM WHICH THEY WILL NOT DEVIATE? THE ANSWER CANNOT BE GIVEN AT THIS TIME, BUT, ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE WITH COMMUNIST PARTIES, THE PRUDENT PRESUMPTION IS THAT THERE WILL BE NO EARLY MEANINGFUL DIVISION IN THE LEADERSHIP, AND THE HARDLINERS OF SAM NEUA WILL CONTINUE TO DICTATE THE PARTY LINE.

16. IN ASSESSING HOW THINGS MAY DEVELOP, WE CAN ONLY NOTE AT PRESENT THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES. THE PATHET LAO HAVE A STRONG POLITICAL POSITION IN CONTROLLING TWO-THIRDS OF THE COUNTRY AND BEING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BODIES OF THE REST. THEY HAVE UNITY, A SINGLE-MINDEDNESS OF PURPOSE, AND A REPUTATION FOR HONESTY. THE VIENTIANE SIDE HAS NOMINAL CONTROL OF THE RICHEST AND MOST POPULATED AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. IT IS COMPOSED OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE COUNTRY'S EDUCATED PEOPLE. BUT, WITH SOUVANNA HAVING BECOME THE ARBITER OF THE TWO PARTIES, THE VIENTIANE SIDE IS LEADERLESS AND DISUNITED. IT IS DEMORALIZED--THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EPISODE HAVING GIVEN IT FURTHER CONFIRMATION THAT, IN A CONFRONTATION WITH THE PATHET LAO, SOUVANNA WILL GIVE IN. IT HAS ALSO THE NOW SERIOUS DISABILITY OF A REPUTATION FOR CORRUPTION.

17. THE MAJOR WEAKNESSES OF THE PATHET LAO ARE THEIR DEPENDENCE ON NORTH VIETNAM AND THE ABSENCE OF A CADRE INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE POPULATED MEKONG VALLEY. VIETNAMESE ARE FEARED BY THE LAO, AND THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF DRV FORCES IN LAOS STOKES THESE FEARS. HOWEVER, THIS ANTI-VIETNAMESE FEELING MAY NOT BE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE IMMEDIATE CONTEST BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. FOR THE PRE-

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SENT, WHAT DETERMINES THE OUTCOME IS THE POLITICAL WILL OF EACH SIDE. SO FAR, IT IS NO SHOW: THE PATHET LAO HAVE SHOWN A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND DIRECTION WHICH THE VIENTIANE SIDE, LEADERLESS AND PREOCCUPIED BY INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS, HAS TOTALLY FAILED TO MATCH.

B. PATHET LAO ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S.

18. THE PATHET LAO ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S. REMAINS AN AMBIVALENT ONE. ON THE PERSONAL PLANE, OUR CONTACTS WITH PATHET LAO LEADERS HAVE BEEN CORDIAL AND BUSINESSLIKE. THE RANKING PATHET LAO REPRESENTATIVE, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/ FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, IS A MAN OF CONSUMMATE POLITENESS AND REASONABLE MIEN, WHOSE INTEMPERATE SPEECHES AT THE OUTSET OF HIS TENURE RAPIDLY MODERATED DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. I HAVE CALLED ON VIRTUALLY ALL PATHET LAO MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES OF STATE, BUT NOT ON SOUPHANOUVONG, WHO HAS REMAINED IN LUANG PRABANG INACCESSIBLE TO FOREIGNERS. THE PATHET LAO LEADERS SPOKE DURING THESE CALLS ABOUT THE NEED FOR CONTINUED USG ASSISTANCE TO THE VIENTIANE SIDE ZONE-- THOUGH NOT TO THEIR OWN ZONE. SOME AMERICAN PROJECTS INVOLVING LAO TRAINEES IN THE U.S. HAVE BEEN ROUTINELY APPROVED BY PATHET LAO MINISTERS, AND PHOUMI VONGVICHIT HIMSELF SIGNED THE NEW FEOF AGREEMENT. NEVERTHELESS, BENEATH THIS FACADE OF PRAGMATIC CORDIALITY, THE TENOR OF PATHET LAO RELATIONS IN TOWN IS STILL STRAINED BY MUTUAL SUSPICION, FUELLED BY THE CONTINUING STRIDENT ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA EMANATING FROM RADIO SAM NEUA. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THIS CONTRADICTION IS BEGINNING TO BOTHER SOME OF THE PATHET LAO LEADERS HERE.

19. I AM SURE YOU NOTED VIENTIANE 3391, WHICH REPORTED THAT PHOUMI VONGVICHIT HAD REQUESTED THE LEADERS IN SAM NEUA TO TONE DOWN THE "BAD WORDS ABOUT THE AMERICANS" ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY WERE IMPAIRING HIS TASK AS PGNU FOREIGN MINISTER TO PROMOTE FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH OUR COUNTRY. HE WAS TOLD IN REPLY THAT, "AS LONG AS THE AMERICANS FLY SPY PLANES OVER LAOS, THEY MUST BE CONDEMNED." HERE IS A CLEAR INDICATION OF THE AMBIVALENCE IN PATHET LAO POLICY TOWARD THE U.S. HERE ALSO IS A CLEAR INDICATION

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OF NORTH VIETNAMESE CONTROL , SINCE THE FEW AERIAL RECON-

NAISSANCE SORTIES STILL FLOWN OVER LAOS COULD NOT SERIOUSLY INHIBIT PATHET LAO FREEDOM OF ACTION IN THEIR OWN ZONE. BECAUSE OF THIS AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE ISSUE, WE MAY SOON FACE SOME DIFFICULTIES IN PURSUING OUR REGULAR MISSION RESUPPLY OPERATIONS TO FRIENDLY ENCLAVES IN THE PATHET LAO ZONE AFTER THE JCCIA HAS DEMARCATED THE RESPECTIVE ZONES OF CONTROL.

C. U.S. OBJECTIVES AND POSTURE

20. IN OUR PREVIOUS QUARTERLY REPORT, WE DISCUSSED THE SHIFT FROM THE U.S. MISSION'S HIGH VISIBILITY "WAR AND NEGOTIATION" PROFILE TO A LESS-INVOLVED AND MORE-RELAXED POSTURE IN LAOS. WE BELIEVE WE HAVE MOVED A CONSIDERABLE WAY IN THIS DIRECTION, AND CONCURRENTLY HAVE BURNISHED THE IMAGE IN THE PUBLIC MIND - DESPITE COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA TO THE CONTRARY - THAT THE USG SUPPORTS THE LAOS SETTLEMENT AND HAS CONSCIENTIOUSLY COMPLIED WITH ITS TERMS.

21. THIS BEING THE CASE, THE QUESTION NOW ARISES WHETHER WE SHOULD MAINTAIN THIS STANCE WITH THE ONSET OF THE DEAD-LINE FOR EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS AND WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS, JUNE 4. TO DATE, THE COMMUNIST SIDE HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION THAT IT HAS ADDRESSED THE MODALITIES FOR THE RELEASE OF THE CAPTURED AMERICAN CIVILIAN PILOT EMMET KAY. ON THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL QUESTION, A NUMBER OF NVA UNITS HAVE DEPARTED BUT SOME ARE STILL HERE, AND THE DRV CONTINUE TO USE THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL TO FURTHER THEIR AMBITIONS TO GAIN CONTROL OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

2. BASICALLY, OUR LEVERAGE IN LAOS TO COMPEL THE COMMUNISTS TO COMPLY WITH EITHER THE LAOS OR VIETNAM AGREEMENTS IS VERY LIMITED. LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS AND THE PUBLIC MOOD IN THE U.S. PRECLUDE ANY THREAT TO USE U.S. MILITARY FORCE. IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT A THREAT TO HALT U.S. AID TO LAOS WOULD BRING HOME THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE U.S. PLACES WITH POW/MIA QUESTION. HOWEVER, WE FEAR THIS WOULD SERIOUSLY WEAKEN THE VIENTIANE SIDE AND UNBALANCE THE EQUILIBRIUM, WITHOUT EXERTING ANY SIGNIFICANT PRESSURE ON THE COMMUNIST SIDE.

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23. WE HAVE BEAT THE BUSHES HERE IN LAOS OVER THE RETURN OF EMMET KAY WITH EVERYONE WE BELIEVED COULD BE USEFUL IN THIS REGARD, AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, THE PROBLEM IS NOT ONE EXCLUSIVELY OF COMMUNIST INTRANSIGENCE, BUT ALSO OF THE DIFFUCULTY ALL LAO HAVE IN ADJUSTING TO THE CONCEPT OF DEADLINES, WHICH THEY REGARD AS THE ARCANES IMPOSITIONS OF THE WESTERN MIND. NO ONE

MOVES QUICKLY IN LAOS, ESPECIALLY TO A DECISION WHICH
BENEFITS THE U.S. BUT DOES NOT GRATIFY ANY INTRINSIC LAO
AIM. THUS, I BELIEVE WE WYKDI BEST TO CONTINUE MAKING
THE ROUNDS AND EXPLAINING OUR DESIRE FOR KAY'S RELEASE AS
AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL OF PATHET LAO SINCERITY IN IMPLEMENTING
ALL PROVISIONS OF THE ACCORDS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE A HARD-
NOSED, COLD WAR APPROACH IS WARRANTED AT THE PRESENT TIME,
BEFORE THE SITUATION IN LAOS HAS JELLED SUFFICIENTLY TO
PERMIT A MORE RELIABLE ASSESSMENT OF WHERE THIS BELEAGUED
COUNTRY- AND U.S. /LAO RELATIONS - GO FROM HERE.
WHITEHOUSE

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